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“Social and Preventive Medicine” – past achievements and future challenges

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50 years of “Social and Preventive Medicine” represents a long and proud part of the history of Public Health in this country and abroad. Unfortunately, much of this recent history of public health goes unrecorded for the time being. In fact since Rosen’s classical “history of Public Health”, not much has been documented (Rosen 1958). This is most regrettable as the evolution of Public Health in Europe, particularly since the end of World War II has been quite remarkable. The same absence of documentation is the case in Switzerland, with few exceptions (Jeanneret 1994). However, this Journal has, over the last 50 years, both accompanied and enriched much of the development in Switzerland – the creation of Public Health chairs at the Swiss Medical Schools, the development of joint national examinations, a common textbook, a specialty board title (“FMH Prevention and Health Services”) and postgraduate training programs (Masters of Public Health; PhD Programs). And, of course, the “Journal” has lived through many attempts, by the Swiss Public Health Association, to secure its financial stability over the years. In addition, it has benefited by the efforts of generations of devoted editors from the Swiss Public Health scene.

Besides many quoted scientific contributions over the years, it has, more recently, also included information on public health activities and networks, such as of “health promotion Switzerland” or the “Network Public Health”, which includes all Swiss institutions interested in the development of Public Health and promotes as a joint endeavour a “Swiss School of Public Health”, hopefully to be started at the end of 2005.

Now, the next fifty years are about to start. Many challenges lay ahead. This relates no so much to some of the obvious changes in the publication markets, such as internet publishing and like, even though these issues must be addressed. More demanding is the answer to the question

of how many public health journals will survive on the long run, in Europe and beyond.

Therefore, the question of the future positioning of the Journal is crucial. Certainly it has to remain pertinent to its “home market” publishing articles covering both basic public health research as well as public health intervention. Beyond the home market, the Journal needs to continue to build its scientific reputation by publishing excellent articles on any area of public health, but central to its future success will be an opening on some of the crucial future issues of interest to the European public health community.

These issues include e. g.

- The demographic transition and its impact on health and health services, and on social security in general. All of Europe will be experiencing aging populations, with a dramatic impact on disease patterns and future health service needs. Due to the combined effects of increasing life expectancy and decreasing fertility, and supposing unchanged immigration patterns, populations all over Europe will even start to shrink around 2025–2030.
- Health status in European populations, with a particular emphasis on the newly enlarged European Union and its new (eastern) member states.

The new European member states are in the process of an enormous economic and societal transition. This presents also many threats and opportunities for health changes and health services reorganization.

- Globalization and international health
The macroeconomic changes at the global level, with subsequent changes in lifestyles of entire communities demand new preventive strategies. They also pose issues of poverty and health between North and South.

– *Advocacy and public policy*

Many of the important public health issues can only be addressed effectively, if modern advocacy strategies are implemented. This includes the forming of alliances between different interest and pressure groups as well as an efficient agenda setting. Furthermore, it needs a detailed understanding of the mechanisms of political processes.

Based on the past successful achievements of the Journal, it will certainly be equipped to meet the challenges ahead!

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